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ABSTRACT

"The Learning Contract," developed by the National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE), is described as a written agreement between parents, teachers, and a student in which all agree to do their best throughout the year to make the student's school experience positive and productive. Directions are given for developing and using the learning contract along with suggestions to parents and teachers for making the contract work. Daily or weekly "report cards," praise, and privileges are discussed as incentives for students in reaching their individual goals. Three sample agreements (for student, parent, and teacher) are provided. (JW)

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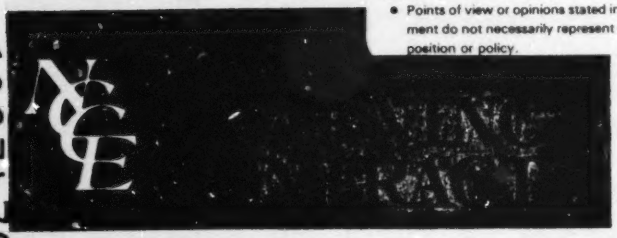

WHAT IT IS, AND HOW IT CAN HELP A CHILD IN SCHOOL

The Learning Contract is a written agreement between parents, teachers, and a student in which all agree to do their best throughout the year to make the student's school experience as positive and productive as it can be.

The Contract recognizes that parents, teachers, and the student all have responsibilities in reaching academic and behavior goals for the individual student. The agreement creates a partnership between home and school that supports and assists a child in school. It can be used successfully with children of all ages and with all ranges of ability and past records of school performance.

The Learning Contract can be visible evidence to students that their parents believe education is important and are willing to become involved. This is important because research on children's achievement in school consistently shows that parents who take steps to become involved in their child's school have a positive influence on their school performance. Through involvement, the parent communicates to the child a feeling of confidence and ability to influence what happens at school. **The Learning Contract** is one way a parent can become involved in improving a child's education.

HOW TO DEVELOP AND USE THE LEARNING CONTRACT

If possible, develop your Contract near the beginning of the school year, using the guidelines in this Contract. Then reread and refer to the document throughout the year.

Involve the student from the beginning in the development of the Contract. Negotiate each point with the student.

Begin with the general responsibilities of parent, student, and teacher suggested in our Contracts, then add specific goals and objectives based on this student's past performance and the student's current desire to progress.

WHAT PARENTS AND TEACHERS CAN DO TO MAKE THE LEARNING CONTRACT WORK

The Learning Contract is not a document to be signed and then forgotten. It will take regular attention by parents and teachers to help a student reach individual goals. The following activities have proved to be successful checkpoints and incentives for students to do their best in school, and may be used along with a Contract.

Daily or weekly "report cards." These more-frequent-than-usual evaluations of skills and behavior encourage students to take pride in even small accomplishments and help pinpoint weaknesses while there is still time to improve before final grades are issued. These frequent reports should be kept simple and short, and take no more than one minute for the teacher to mark.

A daily report for a young child could be as simple as a "smile" card, with a few specific areas targeted for improvement:

Yes	No	
☺		obeys all classroom rules
	X	completes in-seat work
☺		completes homework

For an older child, the card would be more elaborate. Numbers one through four indicate how well a child is doing in each of several skill areas, or in behavior the teacher, student and parent have agreed needs improvement.

Obeys classroom rules.	4
Completes assignments	2
Completes homework	3
Cooperative attitude	4

NOTE: (1) Excellent; (2) Good; (3) Some improvement; (4) Poor

The child with more than one teacher would need a different style card:

Class period	Behavior	Class-work	Homework	Teacher
Algebra	2	2	3	
Science	1	2	1	
French	1	3	1	

Consistently poor marks in daily or weekly reports are a signal to a parent to request a conference with the teacher and get to the bottom of any learning or behavior problems.

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Praise and Privileges. One of the important responsibilities for parents in **The Learning Contract** is to set aside a time each day to discuss school with their child. During this time, find something to praise about your child's school performance. Recognize that even small improvements can raise your child's confidence and self-esteem. "Accent the positive" is a good rule of thumb when discussing school. Respond to poor marks with comments such as "You'll have another chance tomorrow to improve on that."

Researchers have tested a variety of reward and punishment systems in an attempt to improve the performance and behavior of students who require extra help developing the self-discipline needed to succeed in school. Gold stars and later bedtimes are among the rewards offered younger children, while loss of social privileges or TV time are favored by those who use punishment.

We will leave it to you parents to devise your own praise and privilege agreements with your children, but offer a single suggestion, based on research findings: **increased privileges for outstanding effort are more effective in improving performance than the threat of punishment for failure to reach desired goals.** For example, let a child select three activities he/she would enjoy if homework is satisfactorily completed during the term of the Contract.

Now you are ready to consider the three agreements inside this folder. The responsibilities we have listed for the parent, student, and teacher emphasize a cooperative relationship between home and school. We developed **The Learning Contract** after examining a number of other agreements that have been used successfully — but these are by no means the last word on learning agreements. You can use these Contracts as formal, signed agreements, or as a handy reminder of ways to make the school year the most productive possible. **Adapt the lists by adding responsibilities and goals you can all agree upon. Good luck!**

The Learning Contract has been developed and published by the National Committee for Citizens in Education to help parents become actively involved in improving the public school education of their children. NCCE is a nonprofit organization founded in 1973 to improve the education of children by mobilizing and assisting citizens — including parents — to strengthen public schools. NCCE is an advocate for citizens, and helps them gain and use information and skills to influence the quality of public education.

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SEE CONTRACTS ON REVERSE SIDE

STUDENT AGREEMENT

I, _____,

realize that my education is important to me. It helps me develop tools I need to become a happy and productive person.

I also understand that my parent(s) and teacher(s) want to help me do my very best in school, and will do everything they can to ensure that I have the opportunity to succeed. However, I know that I am the one responsible for my own success, and that I must work hard to achieve it.

THEREFORE, I agree to carry out the following responsibilities to the best of my ability:

1. To go to school every day, except when I am ill, and to arrive at school and class on time.
2. To carry home and deliver to my parent(s) all letters, messages, and notes from school.
3. To be ready to talk about my school day and school progress with my family.
4. To be sensitive to the feelings of fellow students, teachers, and other school staff members.
5. To respect myself, the rights and property of others, and to obey all school rules.
6. To complete my daily homework assignments, set aside enough review time for tests, and observe home rules about daily quiet study time.

In addition, I agree to work to reach the following personal learning and behavior goals in school:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

TM

Student _____

Date _____

PARENT AGREEMENT

I, _____,

realize that my child's school years are very important and I understand that my participation in my child's education will help his or her achievement and attitude.

THEREFORE, I agree to carry out the following responsibilities to the best of my ability:

1. To see that my child goes to school every day he/she is not ill, and that he/she leaves for school on time.
2. To reply promptly to all letters, messages, notes, and telephone calls from school.
3. To ask my child every day about his/her school experiences, and not to accept "okay" as the sole answer for how things are going.
4. To encourage my child to be sensitive to the feelings of others — both children and adults.
5. To encourage my child to respect himself/herself, to respect the rights and property of others, and to obey all school rules.
6. To set aside some quiet time and place every day for homework, and to be prepared to give some help with assignments my child finds unclear or difficult.
7. To become as informed about the school program as I can and to meet and speak with my child's teacher frequently, whenever it is appropriate.
8. To attend as many school-related activities as possible.

In addition, I agree to work with my child and his/her teacher on the following specific learning and behavior goals:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

TM

Parent(s) _____

_____

Date _____

TEACHER AGREEMENT

I, _____,

understand the importance of the school experience to every student, and my role as teacher and model for _____.
(student's name)

THEREFORE, I agree to carry out the following responsibilities to the best of my ability:

1. To see that this student receives a well-planned day of instruction for each day in attendance.
2. To reply promptly to letters, messages, notes, and telephone calls from home, and to occasionally write something positive in connection with the student's school performance.
3. To respond to this student as an individual each day, and to indicate by my positive behavior that the student has strengths and can achieve.
4. To be sensitive to the feelings and needs of this student.
5. To respect myself and the rights of children and parents, including the parents' rights to see personal school records, and this student's right to a fair hearing prior to any disciplinary action.
6. To collect, review, evaluate, and respond to this student's work promptly.
7. To keep parents informed, speaking to them frequently and meeting with them whenever it is appropriate.
8. To take all reasonable precautions within my power to assure the student's physical and psychological well-being while at school.

In addition, I agree to work with parent and student toward achieving the following specific learning and behavior goals:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Teacher(s) _____

_____

Date _____